

Chapter ?
Episode One
Kenya – August – 1971

In the autumn of 1978, two of my colleagues in the Primary Education Department at Moray House College of Education, Edinburgh, Ron McKenzie and Alex Peden, at the invitation of the British Council and the Kenyan government, had gone to conduct a two-week In-Service Training Course for Primary School Education Teacher-Trainers at Siriba College, Kisumu, Western Kenya. The content of their practical course comprised the development of teaching aids resourced from the local environment for possible use in the teaching of mathematics, science and language. Unfortunately, with the sudden death of the then Kenyan President, Jomo Kenyatta, the course was interrupted during its first week due to possible country-wide inter-tribal unrest concerning the choice of his successor. In fact, within a few hours of the breaking of the sad news, and of possible dangers to foreigners, Ron and Alex were hurried the 165 miles to Nairobi Airport, from Siriba, and flown back to the UK.

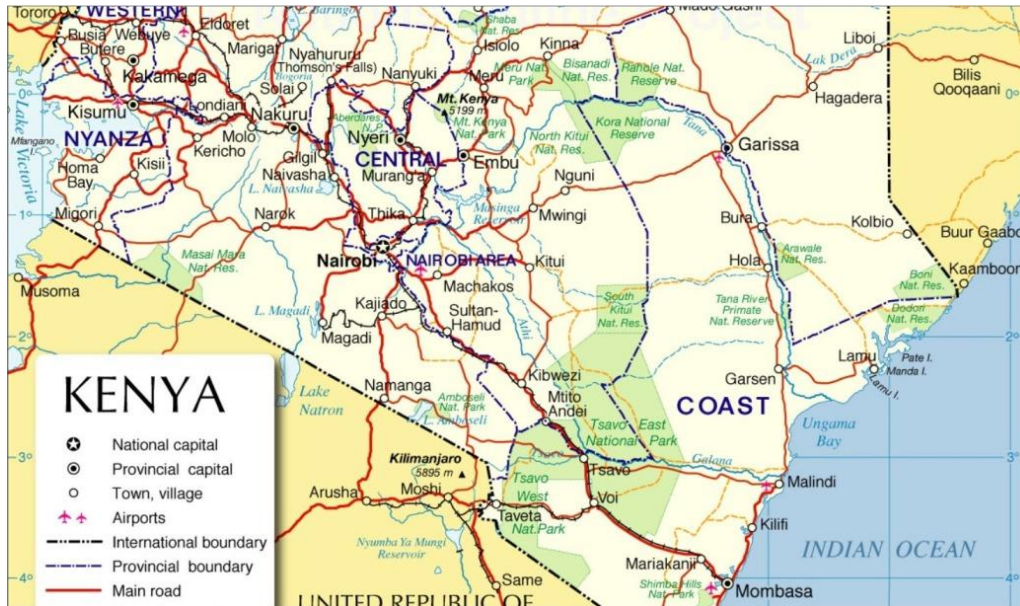
In the event, new President Daniel Arup Moi, the former VicePresident, soon had the country running normally; and, with interest in British Council offerings of In-Service Courses continuing, Ron and Alex, were invited back to Kenya for August, 1979. However, as Alex declared himself unavailable, I was asked in April, 1979 if I could provide the Mathematics input for the postponed course. I thought long and hard about whether I should go, but eventually, despite the fact that I was somewhat nervous about flying even short distances, I decided to accept the opportunity of this probably a once in a lifetime experience. An added incentive was the generous fee on offer, plus an British Airways' open return flight ticket to Nairobi that would allow Ron and me any amount of stop-overs en route, if we so wished.

The first challenges we both faced in June were to undergo the various inoculations required for the good of our health while in Central Africa. These comprised protection against typhoid, yellow fever and tetanus. The only centre in Scotland for yellow fever protection was in Edinburgh, so this was convenient to arrange near our workplace. It also proved to be painless with no later side-effects. Both the tetanus and typhoid injections were authorised to be done by our own family doctors near our homes, but whereas I had no uncomfortable reaction to the renewal of my nearly out-of-date tetanus situation, my response to the typhoid treatment was nasty! I succumbed to a bout of what seemed like the worst forty-eight hour 'flu that I had ever experienced. These three 'ordeals' had to be undergone at least a month and a half before our scheduled departure date in order for us to start a course of protection from malaria by taking one Paludrin tablet per day for the forty days before we left the UK, continuing this while in Africa, and indeed for another forty days after returning home.

While our Scottish students were on vacation in July, I worked hard on my development of ideas for the two week course, and we both planned our curricula in detail ... plus arranging for numerous tools and other accessories to be mailed out to Siriba. Reams of necessary 'hand-outs' were printed for us, and these we decided to take with us as unrestricted hand-baggage. Then, by early August, when our passport and ticketing details had been dealt with expeditiously by London-based British Council officials, we were ready for the off - Edinburgh-London Heathrow-Nairobi - early evening from Edinburgh, and then overnight from London. I regretted, as a novice flier, the fact that I would miss seeing the

Mediterranean and the Sahara Desert etc. in daylight from our Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet, but in fact, as our flight from London was delayed until 9 a.m. the next morning, we both saw as much as we wanted, including widespread bush-fires as we passed over Ethiopia!

On arrival at Nairobi Airport - our landing, due to the high altitude of the city taking the whole length of the extensive runway – we were met by a local British Consular official, driven to our city-centre hotel, wined and dined, briefed about various ‘do’s and don’t’s’, and informed about what was planned for our stay in the city, and for our travels West over to Lake Victoria.

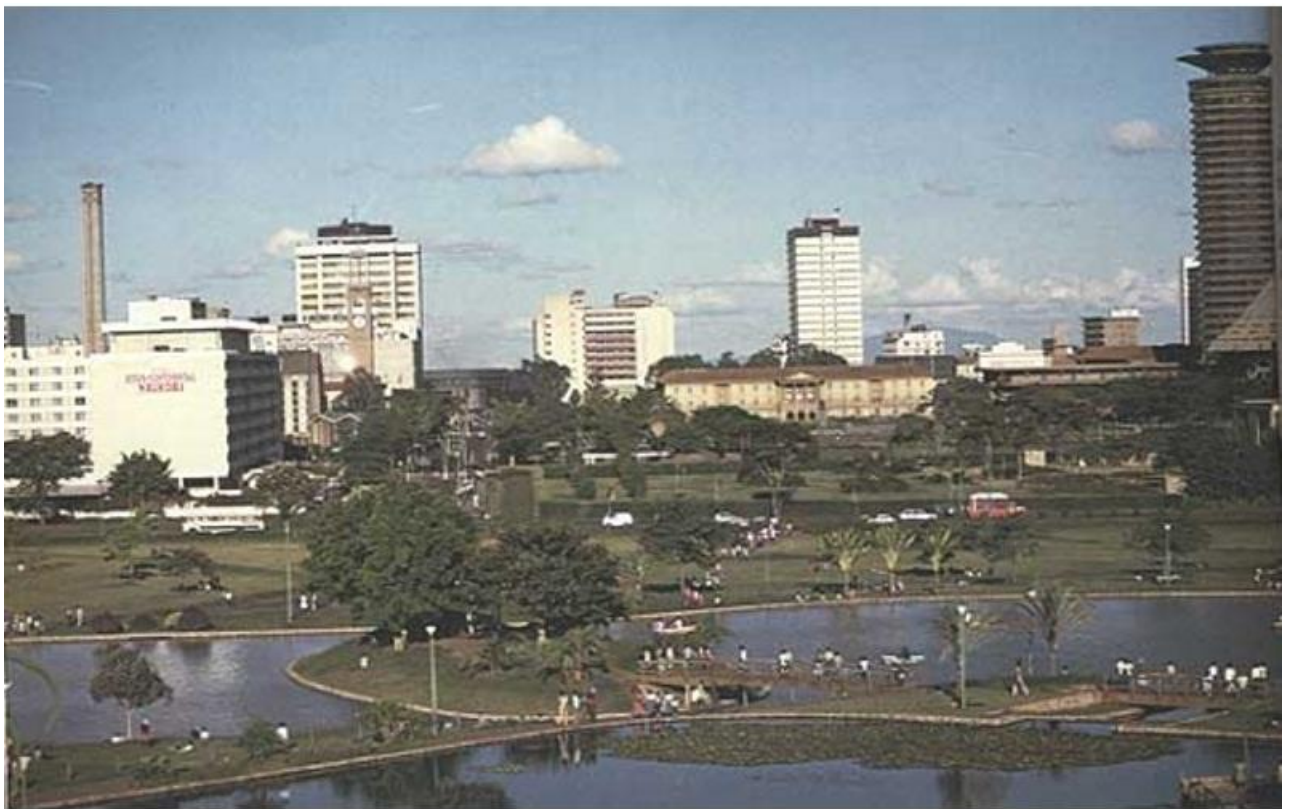


We had three glorious days sight-seeing in the ever 72 degree comfortable warmth of the fairly temperate Nairobi, and, of course, had numerous dips in the hotel swimming pool!

Nairobi



Delamere Avenue from Regal Mansion Govt. Road 1975



Nairobi from Uhuru Park - 1983

Then, on the Saturday morning came ‘a reality check’ with the start of our country-crossing in a **public service mini-bus** over the renowned Rift Valley! As we had expected to be driven privately in school-inspector Chris Onango’s sturdy Toyota Corolla, we were a bit non-plussed! However, in retrospect, the subsequent discomforts of the c. nine-hour journey were well worth the bearing, from what we saw in the wilds, and from the Kenyan passengers we conversed with as and when they joined the jam-packed, noisy Volkswagen. We were warned by the driver at the outset, not to consider offering our seats to anyone, even ladies with babe-in-arms, as it was not expected of any man, far less men of our obvious status! Our seats up front immediately behind him seemingly, apart from our being ‘white’, indicating our importance!

The driver also warned us that it was going to be a long day’s drive ... leaving at about 10 a.m. he would try to reach Kisumu before dusk, normally around 6 p.m! The distance we knew to be about 165 miles, and this meant, with three scheduled rest-stops in Naivasha, Nakuru and Kericho, that at best we would only be averaging about 30 mph! By the time we had reached Naivasha, we realised why the journey would be sluggish. The two-lane tarmac road had disappeared, to be replaced with a single, barely lorry-width road, intermittently hard-surfaced, with many pot-holes, and fairly wide dusty or mud-filled ‘escape routes’ on either side. We soon saw the benefit of the ‘escape routes’ as, intermittently, forty-foot lorries, with ‘right-of-way’, thundered towards us on the made-up roadway! These we learned were carrying precious loads of coffee from Uganda.

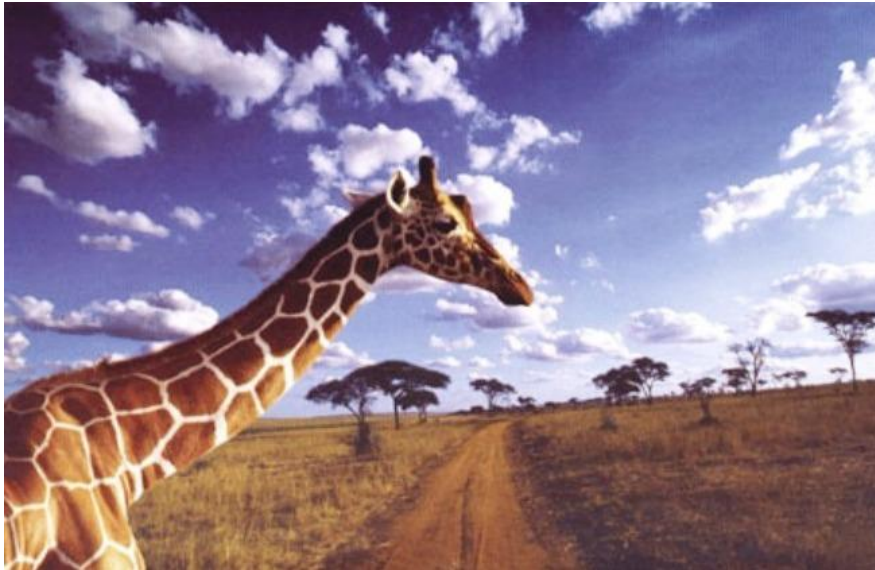
At Naivasha, we had our first sight of flamingos... and drank local beer from a roadside hut ... as popular obviously with the locals as to us! No toilets, so behind a hedge had to serve.



And so on to Nakuru ... a journey packed with animal delights as we traversed part of the **Great Rift Valley**.



Giraffe



Elephant



Hyena



Black Rhinoceros



Maribu Stalks



Then more flamingos at Nakuru



Here we had a good break, stretched our legs, ate some of our sandwiches, and drank water and more beer. Then we took on more passengers, but not all who were in the queueso it was standing-room only for the lucky ones! Most were going on the shortish, relatively speaking, journey to Kericho - probably seeking work on the square miles of tea plantations there - that we got a mere glimpse of in the gathering gloom. By then the heat was lessening and our spirits higher as we sensed Kisumu could not be too far away.



It was after seven, and pitch dark, when we were dropped off unexpectedly at a grubby-looking hotel in town. Charlie, the Siriba College liason officer, known to Ron from the previous year, greeted us warmly, but immediately explained why we must spend the night in town, because the previous night, a motorist had been high-jacked and then murdered on the Maseno road we would have had to take to get to the College campus at Siriba! He wasn't prepared to risk driving us there in darkness, and so we all settled down to a grand dinner and more beer! The hotel was indeed dirty, but the beds were clean and had total-coverage mosquito nets. We slept well despite wondering what lay ahead of us on the morrow?

Kisumu in the morning!

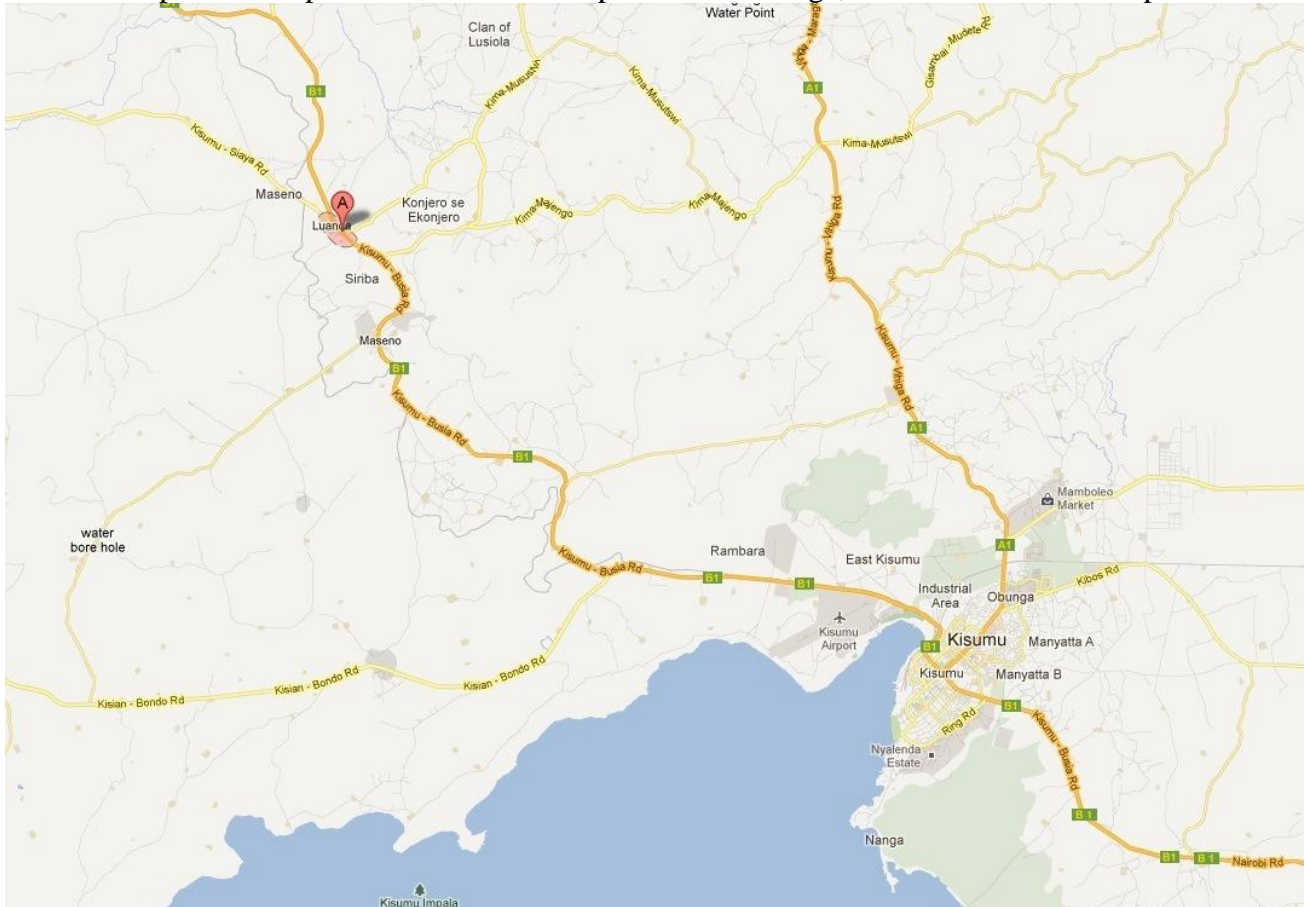


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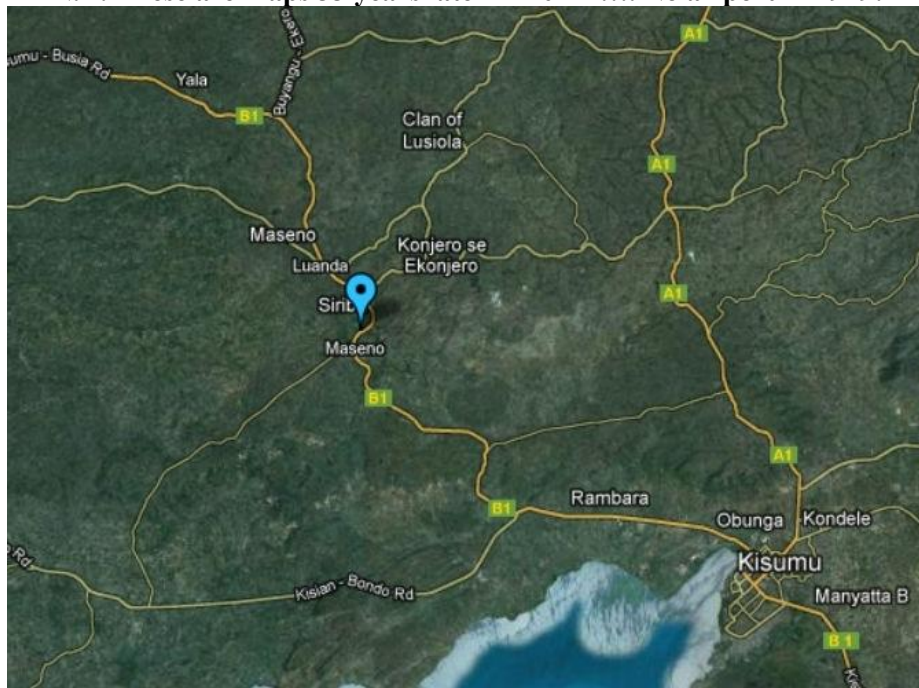
Episode Two

Kenya – August – 1971

Kisumu in the morning was pleasantly warm, and after we'd devoured a hearty breakfast, Charlie and his Toyota Corolla picked us up for the shortish run up to Siriba College, near the small township of Maseno.



N.B. These are maps 33 years later in 2012 No airport in 1979!



Our first stop was to make a ritual crossing of the equator on foot by jumping back and forth over the imaginary line on the roadway. Next we observed the still visible congealed blood on the road from the

we would be getting them to make into teaching-aid models were not currently readily available in Kenya, they undoubtedly would be sooner than they might imagine. Economic progress with foreign aid would see the introduction of many previously unknown industries and inventions that would, among other things, increase waste disposal artefacts. As an answer to our questioning them about current so-called waste products that they might use in schools, there was at first laughter, and then a chorus of, 'banana fibre'!

The final item of the morning was examination of the contents of the walk-in store cupboard ... its holdings of tools scissors, knives, rulers, pencils, felt-pens, glues, cellotapes etc large quantities of cardboard of various dimensions and thicknesses, plus reams of blank and graph paper. The students' reactions to these resources were unanimous gasps of disbelief. These should have been a warning to us because, next morning, when about to start the timetabled activities in two groups which swapped over each afternoon, we found that 'the cupboard was bare'! Not one item, gasped over the previous day, remained.

But Charlie had the answer. He immediately searched under the dormitory beds of each course member, and within minutes had ordered them to return the items they had 'borrowed' to the course store-cupboard! Ron and I had to smile at our ingenuousness in not locking the cupboard door, but we quickly agreed to tell the students that, when the course was over, any remaining items would be shared as evenly as possible among them. This was gladly accepted, amidst laughter. So we nonetheless made a good start to the industrious activities planned. The other important motivation was that all models that students made could be taken back to their colleges scattered widely across the nation.

Colleague Ron McKenzie with Course Members - Siriba College, Kenya, 1979



On the domestic front at lunch-time, we moved our bags and baggage to Father Michael's. Manyassi had made us one of his 'specials' ... tender roast-beef and it was delicious. However, on the way round to our new abode, I nearly came a cropper by unwittingly standing on a line of red ants crossing the lawn. I was immediately attacked round my boots and ankles, but saved by a shove from Ron, and the fact that my cavalry-twill trousers were tucked in closely to my boot-tops. Manyassi had heard our shouts, and appeared with a sweeping brush with which he, not without some difficulty, dispersed the mauraunders from my person. However the marching ants continued on their way right through the garden of our new home. And what a mess they made of the lawn and flower-beds there!

Finally on the opening day, Chief Inspector Chris Onango arrived to see how things were going. But nobody said a word to him about the temporary purloining that had occurred. Ron and I were sure that this ‘mums the word’ attitude by us raised our stock even more highly amongst the students.

Kenyan Education Inspector Chris Onango



Chapter ?
Episode Three
Kenya – August – 1979

Little needs to be said about the first week spent in our workshop-classrooms apart from the fact that they were cheery interactions as we guided the students through the more difficult parts of their interpreting of the printed instructions in our prepared hand-outs. Initially they tended to prefer individual activity more than co-operative group effort. Of course this made our teaching job more onerous, but after a day or two, as they got to know each other better, and much to our relief, most opted for sharing in small groups of twos or threes. However, intermittent plenary sessions had been planned, and thus the more common problems faced were shared and dealt with much more economically in terms of teacher contact time. Soon my 'laboratory' became a much brighter place as colourful pictures and models were displayed around the edges of the work-spaces, and the more fragile efforts placed safely in a special reserved area.

In school, one is usually reliant on the clock to mark out, work-times, break-times and finishing-times, but on the equator, we discovered that the afternoon closing time was dictated by the weather! Although the sun's heat in class was never all that daunting, humidity was a greater trial; but rain, torrential rain, every evening about 5pm was a blessing, preluded as it was by rising wind which rattled the corrugated iron roofs of our classrooms. This became the daily signal to down tools and get to our house, and the students to their dormitories, to avoid getting soaked through. Ron and I had the umbrellas that we had brought over from Scotland, and they were very useful, because the wind always dropped before the heavens opened to allow vertical deluging. Within half-an-hour or so, the rain would cease, and all plant-life dry quickly in the beautiful, if short, gloamings.

Meals prepared by Manyassi for Ron and me were filling and delicious, and we amazingly quickly became accustomed to being served hand and foot. Among other things, like restocking our beer supply from the village, Manyassi made beds, swept rooms and dealt with our dirty, sweaty clothes' washing, drying, and even ironing! All this was accompanied by the house-parrot, who said, 'Hodie' in Swahili, [Good-morning], ad nauseam, when you passed nearby his perch out in the porch.



Our evenings in Father Michael's house after he went off visiting in the Masai Mara were much more subdued. As most days we were dead-beat after our hours of teaching, early to bed and early to rise became our watchword. However, one evening incident stands out in my memory. Manyassi was clearing the dishes from our dinner-table when I spotted a huge lizard-type creature poking its head out from behind a picture on the wall. Never having seen the likes before, I emitted a shout (almost scream!) of

horror, at which point the lizard shot back behind the picture, and Manyassi, with peals of laughter did what could easily be described as 'a highland jig' around the table. When he had gained control of himself he smilingly explained that the 'gecko' that had alarmed me, and its relatives, were house-guests who dealt very efficiently with insects, flies and mosquitoes etc. and thus were our friends. I wasn't so sure, but gradually became accustomed to their presence.

By the Friday evening, we and the students were ready for the week-end break from work. The Kenyan authorities had anticipated this, so had arranged, at their expense, that Ron and I could enjoy two days and nights full-board in the Sunset Hotel, Kisumu. Having seen pictures of the hotel in brochures whilst in Nairobi, we were not about to refuse! So, Charlie drove us back to town before dusk and we even had time for a welcome dip in the hotel pool before dinner in the plush hotel restaurant. One feature we noticed particularly on our arrival was the presence day and night of a guard patrolling each outside corridor of each floor of the hotel. This confirmed in our minds the warning that Charlie had given us ... "Don't leave the hotel after dark." However, we planned to see as much as possible of the town in daylight hours.



Sunset hotel is situated in a magnificent landscape garden with unrivalled view of Lake Victoria, just 5 minutes from Kisumu city centre

The lodge borders the Kisumu Impala Sanctuary – a haven for endangered impala and a secure grazing ground for hippo.

Kisumu 'Sunset Hotel' Entrance



Kisumu 'Sunset Hotel' - Swimming Pool



Looking Over Lake Victoria To Uganda From The Sunset Hotel, Kisumu



Chapter ?
Episode Four
Kenya – August – 1979

It was no great surprise to us on the Saturday morning after we had walked the 300 yards or so into Kisumu town centre that we did not find much to interest us. It was virtually ‘a one horse town’ with few pavements bordering the one street we found with any shops. However, we did find our previously used hotel, a post office, a council building and a bank, and that was about it, apart from a huge tented market nearby where I am seen to be standing in the following photograph.



However, after we had wandered aimlessly through the market, our attention on the way back to the hotel was this time caught by the amazing variety of flowers, plants and trees in the gardens of a number of impressive villas. The brass name plates on their dauntingly high gates identified them with the probable local elite and as holiday homes for important politicians. The magnificent views over Lake Victoria that these dwellings commanded was no doubt one reason for their being chosen by their owners. Another reason may have been the hope that such would also prove to be sound investments during the probable rapid development predicted for the town!

Thus, uninspired by the town itself, we decided to relax in the hotel grounds for the duration of our two-day stay. The pool vicinity seemed to be the hub of any social life to be found there, so we joined the sun-bathers and awaited developments. However, I knew that the best way to make friends with similar interests to ourselves was to chat with folks while swimming, so I persuaded Ron to come with me for one of the few lessons that I had promised him as a novice. It wasn't long before we were joined by an English couple who, it transpired, were enjoying a similar but shorter break to ours at the expense of their Kenyan sponsors of summer schools for local district students of English language. They were old-hands at this type of educational programme in Kenya, and thus had many stories to tell and advice to proffer. Over more than a few drinks and hours in the shade we became good, if temporary friends. Perhaps the most important advice given early on in our confab was about the danger of disease lurking in the waters of Lake Victoria! Jim obviously knew his stuff for his warning went something like this – “Don't bathe or wade in Lake Victoria because it carries a parasite called ‘Schistosomes’ which causes a human disease called ‘Bilharzia’. Parasitic worms can penetrate human skin and enter the blood system and infect the bladder and liver. It can

be life-threatening.” We were duly impressed, and, from then on, for all its beauty, we decided to admire the lake from afar and thus took another photograph of it that evening at sunset.

Sunset over Lake Victoria to Kisumu, Kenya over from the Ugandan border



Tea-time on Sunday came all too quickly, at which point Charlie arrived to take us back to the college in daylight to make ready for the work of the morrow. But he also advised us that he and the college principal had been alerted to the likelihood that newly appointed President Moi might visit the college about noon on Monday morning. On arrival at the college gates, we were met by the sight of many male servants brushing driveways, and indeed white-painting every coping-stone that lined the possible red shale route that the President’s car might take. Also on the possible route, tree stumps, *[recently left after the obtaining of charcoal to be sold-off for college funds]*, became ‘whitewash victims’ too! The President was expecting to be met by all local citizens at the roadside near the college drive, and there he would offer ‘Harambee’ – that being money for the people, as well as money for any local development committees’ social improvement projects. In the event, next day, everybody, including Ron and I, who had of course shortened our morning workshops, stood dutifully at the road-end, paper Kenyan flags at the ready, waiting for the limousine and its imperious presidential party to arrive. But all that happened was a brief stop by the entourage, and a fairly speedy distribution of bank notes to some, and handshakes to an honoured few (*not us!*) And no visit to the college itself !

During our afternoon work sessions, both Ron and I noticed that the numbers attending had depleted. We alerted Charlie and he sought out the reason, or reasons, for the lower attendance. In due course he returned to inform us that the absentees were all unwell with what he suspected to be malaria! He called in the local doctor, and he, being necessarily thorough, not only after testing the already ill, also examined all the other course members. He declared about half the members clear of the disease, but the others definitely affected.

Inspector Chris Onango was called over from his Kericho headquarters, and, after assessing the situation, decided that the course would be abandoned immediately, and all participants sent home next day. The reason for so many catching the disease was soon identified as failure by those students from non-malarial areas of the country to have been, unlike us, taking a prescribed course of Paludrin.

Quite disappointed by events, Ron and I quickly arranged for fair distribution of the quite significant amount of resources, and invited the students to collect, and take home, all the teaching aids that each had already constructed. Chris Onango told us that we would now be looked after in Nairobi for the rest of the week, and that he would personally drive us there the next day, with a bit of sight-seeing on the way.

So, on the Tuesday morning, it was farewell to Charlie, and Manyassi and his devoted hospitality, but not before we had given our ‘home-minder’ our two umbrellas and enough cash, as we were later told, to pay for all his children’s education for the next five years! The wee man was over the moon, and Ron and I

had the lasting memory of him in his un-stockinged boots marching proudly round the campus, an umbrella open aloft!

Chris did us proud on the road home, particularly with a visit to the Kericho hotel, [pictured below], for a midday meal and detailed accounts of tea-growing in the area.



On a most pleasant journey to Nairobi, a final act of kindness by Chris occurred when we were just outside the city limits on the escarpment. He knew that we each wished to purchase a sheepskin rug from those that we had previously seen on the outward trip being touted by roadside traders. He insisted on doing the bartering on our behalf with the last of these ‘salesmen’ for the following two reasons “The closer we are to the city, the more anxious they are to sell at less than half the price charged by the many others we have passed. Also you, as foreigners, would most certainly be cheated, but they won’t dare try their tricks on me.” Thus we both got a sheepskin rug ‘for a song’!